



Press Clipping Article

Title: After The Buyout: Farmers having to learn new tricks

Date: 02/25/2007

Source: [Advocate Messenger \(Danville\)](#)

Writer: BRENDA S. EDWARDS

Lead:

Keith and Kevin Middleton have worked in tobacco alongside their dad all of their lives, but they realize there's still plenty to learn about growing and marketing the crop.

Article:

LANCASTER - Keith and Kevin Middleton have worked in tobacco alongside their dad all of their lives, but they realize there's still plenty to learn about growing and marketing the crop.

"If we plan to stay in business, we need to learn as much as we can," says Keith Middleton.

The 43-year-old Middleton twins want to continue the farm family tradition of their father, Maurice Middleton, foreman for the large Teater Brothers Farm for more than 40 years.

Though many growers quit raising tobacco after the federal buyout, the Middletons decided to continue. That's why they want to learn as much as possible about tobacco in a time when the method of production and marketing is changing at a fast pace.

They are among 22 tobacco producers from Garrard, Boyle and Lincoln counties enrolled in an Innovative Tobacco Growers Program.

The three all-day sessions have the latest information on tobacco production based on research presented by University of Kentucky College of Agriculture experts. "It doesn't matter what business you're in, you're never too old to learn," said Keith.

Lincoln County farmer Jeff Morris, who's 42, said the classes are worthwhile. "They are more intensive and in-depth and cover more information than the old production meetings."

Production costs have skyrocketed, and growing tobacco is not as stable as it used to be, Morris said. "That's why it's important to attend the meetings. The research and development sessions for farmers are beneficial, because farmers can't afford to do the research."

The Tobacco Transition Payment Program, known as the "tobacco buyout," helps tobacco producers transition to the free market, according to the Farm Services Agency Web site.

The Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004 ended the Depression-era tobacco quota program and established the buyout program that provides annual payments for 10 years to eligible tobacco quota holders and producers.

Funded through assessments

Payments began in 2005 and will continue through 2014. Payments are funded through assessments of about \$10 billion on tobacco product manufacturers and importers.

The Middletons and Morris grow tobacco plants in greenhouses. The Middletons switched to the greenhouse method in 1990, and Morris was among the first to switch from the conventional plant beds. Morris also sells a few plants each year.

"We never went back to conventional plant beds after using the greenhouse," said Keith Middleton. "We are getting ready to plant seed to be ready in May to transplant."

With the cost of and trouble getting labor to help with his tobacco crop, Morris has cut his production to almost half this year compared to last season. He went from 22 to 12 acres. Last year, he failed to get an acre of tobacco harvested due to labor.

"The labor situation doesn't look like it's going to improve," Morris said. Using Mexican laborers is about the only choice he has because there are not enough local people who want to work in tobacco, he added.

"It's hard work, and we need at least a dozen workers during harvest season for housing and stripping," Morris said.

The Middletons also have problems finding laborers. The brothers produce about 100,000 pounds of tobacco, a little more than they had in the traditional quota program.

"We could have more pounds, but labor is hard to get," Keith Middleton said.

Diversified operation

The Middletons and Morris contract with tobacco companies to sell their burley before the crops are even planted.

"It's not an ideal situation and may get worse if the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) gets more strict on what chemicals can be applied to tobacco," Morris said.

Morris farms with his father, Wendell Morris, on land in the Hubble community that the Morris family has farmed more than 100 years. They plan to stay in the farming business although the elder Morris is semi-retired.

The Morrises have a diversified operation with cows and calves, corn, hay, soybeans and wheat, plus selling a few tobacco plants from the greenhouse.

A graduate of Western Kentucky University with a degree in agriculture, Morris has farmed most of his life.

"I farm for the lifestyle," said Morris, who says nature is his boss.

For the Middletons, farming is a way of life they don't want to give up.

"Farming is better than driving to Lexington every day to work. We can be our own boss and control our working hours," said Keith Middleton.

[Previous Page](#) [Return to Search](#)

Copyright © 2001-2003 Commonwealth of Kentucky.

All rights reserved.

Generated Date: 3/22/2007 4:44:49 PM